

# Liu Shaoqi



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[Liu Shaoqi, 1898-1969](#)

## How to Be a Good Communist

1939

### Chapter 1

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**Comrades,**

The question I shall discuss is how members of the Communist Party should cultivate and temper themselves. It may not be unprofitable to the building and consolidation of the Party to take up this question at this present time.

### I. Why Communists Must Undertake Self Cultivation

Why must Communists undertake to cultivate themselves?

In order to live, man must wage a struggle against nature and make use of nature to produce material values. At all times and under all conditions, his production of material things is social in character. It follows that when men engage in production at any stage of social development, they have to enter into certain relations of production with one another. In their ceaseless struggle against nature, men ceaselessly change nature and simultaneously change themselves and their mutual relations. Men themselves, their social relations, their form of social organization and consciousness were all different from what they are today, and in the future they will again be different.

Mankind and human society are in process of historical development. When human society reached a certain historical stage, classes and class struggle emerged. Every member of a class society exists as a member of a given class and lives in given conditions of class struggle. Man's social being determines his consciousness. In class society the ideology of the members of each class reflects a different position and different class interests. The class struggle constantly goes on among these classes with their different positions, interests and ideologies. Thus it is not only in

the struggle against nature but in the struggle of social classes that men change nature, change society and at the same time change themselves.

Marx and Engels said:

“Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration that can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; the revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.<sup>2</sup>”

That is to say, the proletariat must conscientiously go through long periods of social revolutionary struggles and, in such struggles change society and change itself.

We should therefore see ourselves as in need of change and capable of being changed. We should not look upon ourselves as immutable, perfect and sacrosanct, as persons who need not and cannot be changed. When we pose the task of remoulding ourselves in social struggle, we are not demeaning ourselves; the objective laws of social development demand it. Unless we do so, we cannot make progress, or fulfill the task of changing society.

We Communists are the most advanced revolutionaries in modern history; to day the changing of society and the world rests upon us and we are the driving force in this change. It is by unremitting struggle against counter-revolutionaries<sup>3</sup> that we Communists change society and the world, and at the same time ourselves.

When we say Communists must remould themselves by waging struggles in every sphere against the counter-revolutionaries,<sup>3</sup> we mean that it is through such struggles that they must seek to make progress and must enhance their revolutionary quality and ability. An immature revolutionary has to go through a long process of revolutionary tempering and self-cultivation, a long process of remoulding, before he can become a mature and seasoned revolutionary who can grasp and skilfully apply the laws of revolution. For in the first place, a comparatively immature revolutionary, born and bred in the old society, carries with him the remnants of the various ideologies of that society (including its prejudices, habits and traditions), and in the second he has not been through a long period of revolutionary activity. Therefore he does not yet have a really thorough understanding of the enemy, of the people or of the laws of social development and revolutionary struggle. In order to change this state of affairs, besides learning from past revolutionary experience (the practice of our predecessors), he must himself

participate in contemporary revolutionary practice, and in this revolutionary practice and struggle against all kinds of counter revolutionaries,<sup>3</sup> he must bring his conscious activity into full play and work hard at study and self-cultivation. Only so can he acquire deeper experience and understanding of the laws of social development and revolutionary struggle, acquire a really thorough understanding of the enemy and the people, discover his wrong ideas, habits and prejudices and correct them, and thus raise the level of his political consciousness, cultivate his revolutionary qualities and improve his revolutionary methods. Hence, in order to remould himself and raise his own level, a revolutionary must take part in revolutionary practice from which he must on no account isolate himself. Moreover, he must strive to conduct self-cultivation and study in the course of practice. Otherwise, it will still be impossible for him to make progress.

For example, several Communists take part in a revolutionary mass struggle together and engage in revolutionary practice under roughly the same circumstances and conditions. It is possible that the effect of the struggle on these Party members will not be at all uniform. Some will make very rapid progress and some who used to lag behind will even forge ahead of others. Other Party members will advance very slowly. Still others will waver in the struggle and, instead of being pushed forward by revolutionary practice, will fall behind. Why?

Or take another example. Many members of our Party were on the Long March; it was a severe process of tempering for them, and the overwhelming majority made very great progress indeed. But the Long March had the opposite effect on certain individuals in the Party. After having been on the Long March they began to shrink before arduous struggles, and some of them even planned to back out or to run away and later, succumbing to outside allurements, actually deserted the revolutionary ranks. Many Party members took part in the Long March together, and yet its impact and results varied very greatly. Again, why?

Basically speaking, these phenomena are reflections of our revolutionary ranks of the class struggle in society. Our Party members differ in quality because they differ in social background and have come under different social influences. They differ in their attitude, stand and comprehension in relation to the revolutionary practice, and consequently they develop in different directions in the course of revolutionary practice. This can clearly be seen in your institute as well. You all receive the same education and training here, and yet because you differ in quality and experience, in degree of effort and self-cultivation, you may obtain different or even contrary results. Hence, subjective effort and self-cultivation in the course of revolutionary struggle are absolutely essential, indeed, indispensable for a revolutionary in remoulding himself and raising his own level.

Whether he joined the revolution long ago or just recently, every Communist who wants to become a good politically mature revolutionary must undergo a long period of tempering in revolutionary struggle, must steel himself in mass revolutionary struggles and all kinds of difficulties and hardships, must sum up the experience gained through practice, make great efforts in self-cultivation, raise his ideological level, heighten his ability and never lose sense of what is new. For only thus can he turn himself into a politically staunch revolutionary of high quality.

Confucius said “At fifteen, my mind was bent on learning. At thirty, I could think for myself. At forty, I was no longer perplexed. At fifty, I knew the decree of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was attuned to the truth. At seventy, I can follow my heart’s desire without transgressing what is right.”<sup>4</sup> Here the feudal philosopher was referring to his own process of self-cultivation; he did not consider himself to have been born a “sage”.

Mencius, another feudal philosopher, said that no one had fulfilled a “great mission” and played a role in history without first undergoing a hard process of tempering, a process which “exercises his mind with suffering and toughens his sinews and bones with toil, exposes his body to hunger, subjects him to extreme poverty, thwarts his undertakings and thereby stimulates his mind, tempers his character and adds to his capacities”.<sup>5</sup> Still more so must Communists give attention to tempering and cultivating themselves in revolutionary struggles, since they have the historically unprecedented “great mission” of changing the world.

Our Communist self-cultivation is the kind essential to proletarian revolutionaries. It must not be divorced from revolutionary practice or from the actual revolutionary movements of the labouring masses, and especially of the proletarian masses.

Comrade Mao Zedong has said:

“Discover the truth through practice, and again through practice verify and develop the truth. Start from perceptual knowledge and actively develop it into rational knowledge; then start from rational knowledge and actively guide revolutionary practice to change both the subjective and the objective world. Practice, knowledge, again practice and again knowledge. This form repeats itself in endless cycles, and with each cycle the content of practice and knowledge rises to a higher level. Such is the whole of the dialectical-materialist theory of knowledge, and such is the dialectical-materialist theory of the unity of knowing and doing.”<sup>6</sup>

Our Party members should temper themselves and intensify their self-cultivation not only in the hardships, difficulties and reverses of revolutionary practice, but also

in the course of smooth, successful and victorious revolutionary practice. Some members of our Party cannot stand the plaudits of success and victory; they let victories turn their heads, become brazen, arrogant, and bureaucratic and may even vacillate, degenerate and become corrupted, completely losing their original revolutionary quality. Individual instances of this kind are not uncommon among our Party members. The existence of such a phenomenon in the Party calls for our comrades' sharp attention.

In past ages, before the proletarian revolutionaries appeared on the scene, practically all revolutionaries became corrupted and degenerated with the achievement of victory. They lost their original revolutionary spirit and became obstacles to the further development of the revolution. China's history over the past century, or to speak of more recent times, over the past fifty years, has shown us that many bourgeois and petty-bourgeois revolutionaries in the past and by the nature of earlier revolutions. Before the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia, all revolutions throughout history invariably ended in the suppression of the rule of one exploiting class by that of another. Thus, once they themselves became the ruling class, these revolutionaries lost their revolutionary quality and turned round to oppress the exploited masses; this was the inexorable law.

But such can never be the case with the proletarian revolution and with the Communist Party. The proletarian revolution is a revolution to abolish all exploitation, oppression and classes. The Communist Party represents the proletariat which is itself exploited but does not exploit others and which can therefore carry the revolution through to the end finally abolish all exploitation and sweep away all the corruption and rottenness in human society. The proletariat is able to build a strictly organized and disciplined party and set up a centralized and at the same time democratic state apparatus, and through the Party and this state apparatus, it is able to lead the masses of the people in waging unrelenting struggle against all corruption and rottenness and in ceaselessly weeding out of the Party and the state organs all those elements that have become corrupt and degenerate (whatever high office they may hold), thereby preserving the purity of the Party and the state apparatus. This outstanding feature of the proletarian revolution and of the proletarian revolutionary party did not and could not exist in earlier revolutions and revolutionary parties. Members of our Party must be clear on this point, and — particularly when the revolution is successful and victorious and when they themselves enjoy the ever greater confidence and support of the masses — they must sharpen their vigilance, intensify their self-cultivation in proletarian ideology and always preserve their pure proletarian revolutionary character so that they will not fall into the rut of earlier revolutionaries who degenerated in the hour of success.

Tempering and self-cultivation in revolutionary practice and tempering and self-cultivation in proletarian ideology are important for every Communist, especially after the seizure of political power. The Communist Party did not drop from heaven but was born out of the Chinese society. Every member of the Communist party has come from this society, is living in it today and is constantly exposed to its seamy side. It is not surprising then that Communists, whether they are of proletarian or non-proletarian origin and whether they are old or new members of the Party, should carry with them to a greater or lesser the thinking and habits of the old society. In order to preserve our purity as vanguard fighters of the proletariat and to enhance our revolutionary quality and working ability that is essential for every Communist to work hard to temper and cultivate himself in every respect.

These are the reasons why Communists must undertake self-cultivation. I shall now discuss the criteria for Communist self-cultivation.

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[A] In the original transcription of this work, the Editorial Committee on Party Literature (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China) opted to separate editorial and explanatory notes into two separate categories, independently numbered relative to (1) the type of note and (2) chronological appearance in the text.

Both editorial and explanatory notes are presented in the present transcription in chronological order based solely on the current order of relevance to the selected text.

1. A lecture delivered at the institute of Marxism-Leninism in Yan'an. It was included in the Documents for the Rectification Movement Published by the Liberation Press in 1943 and was reprinted by the People's Publishing House in 1962 after revision by the author.

2. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The German Ideology", *Collected Works*, Eng. Ed., Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, Vol. V, pp. 52-53.

3. When this article was reprinted by the People's Publishing House in March 1980, the following editorial note appeared in the Chinese edition:  
In the 1962 edition, after the word "counter-revolutionaries" was added "and reformists". This addition was not by the author himself, but by the editors with the approval of the author. We are now publishing it in accordance with the 1949 edition.

4. Confucius (551-479 B.C.) was also known as Kong Qiu or Zhongni. A native of Zouyi in the state of Lu (now Qufu County, Shandong Province) in the Spring and Autumn Era, he was the founder of the Confucian school of philosophy. This quotation is from the Confucian Analects, “Wei Zheng”.

5. Mencius (372-289 B.C.), known as Meng Ke, was a native of Zou (now south-eastern Zouxian County, Shandong Province) in the era of the Warring States. He was the main proponent of the Confucian doctrine after Confucius. This quotation is from *Mencius*, Book VI, “Gao Zi”, Part II.

6. See “On Practice”, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, Eng. ed., FLP, Beijing, 1975, Vol. I, p.308.

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**Course: Basics**

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